



12

## International Choral Fest seeks host families

Missoula's International Choral Festival is looking for individuals and families (about 200 actually!) to host international singers during the ninth festival, July 17-20. International choirs from five continents are planning to participate in the festival this summer, from Argentina to Russia, and Taiwan to Zimbabwe. A preview of participating choirs is available at [choralfestival.org](http://choralfestival.org).

Most choirs will arrive Tuesday, July 16, and leave Sunday or Monday, July 21-22. Hosts provide private sleeping accommodations, most meals and transportation during festival week. In return, hosts receive two passes to all festival concerts and social events, and enjoy a uniquely personal experience.

"Hosting requires an investment of time and energy," says Executive Director Melissa Blunt. "However, your efforts will be well worth it!"

ICF has brought the world's best choirs together in Missoula since its first festival in 1987.

Visit [www.choralfestival.org](http://www.choralfestival.org) and select the HOST button for further information and to access the on-line Host Application. For details, contact 406-721-7985 or [info@choralfestival.org](mailto:info@choralfestival.org).

# MONTANA CIRCLE OF AMERICAN MASTERS

## Five new members added to MCAM roster

By Cindy Kittredge  
Folk Arts and Market Specialist

Whether it's a traditional Cheyenne courting flute or a bamboo fly-rod, the work created by the most recently endorsed Montana Circle of American Masters reflects the artist's Montana connections and helps to deepen an awareness of what it means to be Montanan.

In December, the Montana Arts Council added to its distinguished roll of Montana's Circle of American Masters (MCAM) in the Visual Folk and Traditional Arts by endorsing a bamboo fly-rod maker, a leather artist, a creator of traditional Cheyenne flutes, a Crow beadworker and a bowyer. These five artists join the roll call of other Montana folk and traditional artists whom the program has honored.

**Glenn Brackett, Butte:** The owner of Sweetgrass Rods in Twin Bridges is widely considered to be one of the preeminent bamboo fly-fishing rod builders of the current era. He grew up in the San Francisco area, learning to fish from his father and grandfather, who also took him to the R.L. Winston Rod Company headquarters (founded in 1929). There, Brackett was introduced to the men who worked with bamboo. He never lost the passion that grew out of those experiences.

After service in the Peace Corps and Army, Brackett began working for Winston Rods, becoming an owner in the company and moving with the company to Twin Bridges. In 1991, after the sale of Winston Rods, he continued his work in building bamboo rods. With his work, he has been an important part of the movement to raise awareness and preserve the art of bamboo fly-rod building.

Brackett is known to be a patient teacher, helping all who come through his doors. Person by person, he has worked to build the awareness of this art form.

In 2012, he was inducted into the Catskills Rod Makers Hall of Fame. His efforts to restore bamboo rods that have been in service for over 100 years also indicate his selfless dedication to the craft.

**Howard Knight, Stevensville:** This Montana leather artist was raised on a northern Idaho horse ranch. When he was eight years old, his leather 4-H project was the start of a life-long passion. That skill of leather carving became an ever-present hobby while Knight worked as an electrician. However, after a life-changing accident, he picked up his swivel knife and for the past 12 years has not put it down.

Knight specializes in filigree work in the western floral style and has collaborated with a range of artists, including bootmaker Lisa Sorrell, clothing designer Paul Hausvick of Boucher Leather in Santa Fe, silversmith Rob Schaezlein III, bronze sculptor Rip Caswell, jewelry designer Doug Magnus, and Axel's of Vail, CO.

He has created custom boots that have taken over 800 hours of hand tooling, including one pair that has become known as the most expensive pair of boots made, selling for \$106,000.

Although Knight spends over 40 hours a week tooling and working leather in his shop in western Montana, he gladly takes the time to pass on the tradition of leather craft to the next generation of 4-H leatherworkers. He has taught leatherwork to approximately 25 4-H

members over the past six years, in addition to mentoring the current owner of Ralph Harmon Custom Leather in Sebastopol, CA.

Knight gives demonstrations during the shows he attends (like the Harley-Davidson event in Milwaukee, WI), taking time to teach each potential customer about the quality, precision and skill that go into a one-of-a-kind piece.

**Jay Old Mouse, Lame Deer:** This flute maker is considered by the Northern Cheyenne people to be the designated keeper and maker of the Cheyenne courting flute, which was handed down to him through the lineage of known keepers, from Turkey Legs in the late 1800s, to Grover Wolf Voice, to his grandfather Black Bear, and now to Old Mouse. The honor and the flute-making skills were bestowed on him when he was in his early twenties by his grandfather with a long

list of cultural protocols to follow. Old Mouse was a certified carpenter at the time he became the keeper and, to this day, he uses the historical methods and protocols in making and playing the flute. The courting flute was originally used by a male suitor to attract a mate. It is also used in prayer, as a source of social entertainment, to honor individuals at events like funerals and birthdays, and as a tool to alleviate suffering. Old Mouse follows his grandfather's teachings and plays when

asked at funerals, graduations, in schools, in church and at weddings.

Because of his commitment to the protocols handed down to him and to providing comfort to his community through his performances, Old Mouse is highly regarded among his people. He is also concerned about teaching both natives and non-natives about the significance of the Cheyenne courting flute.

To teach about the flute, he has presented at Cheyenne Frontier Days, the National Folk Festival in Butte, the Cheyenne Immersion Camp, American Indian Heritage day at Miles City Community College, the American Indian Housing Initiative at Penn State, and for 20 years for international guests of the Cheyenne Trailriders.

Jim Rempp, Missoula: This accomplished bowyer was born in Nevada, and accompanied his father,

hunting rabbits and deer and prepping their skins. Learning from his dad how to make a willow whistle led to a love of wood and laid a groundwork for an early interest in archery and making bows.

Rempp spent hours trying to build functional bows that would shoot straight and not self-destruct. His bow-making dreams were put aside when he moved with his family to Hawaii. There he carved his own surfboards, becoming one

of the first to carve a short board when nearly all surfboards were long boards.

Rempp's love of wood led him to apprenticeship for four years in the rigorous Japanese apprenticeship system. The Japanese sense of beauty, simplicity and functionality influenced him; and he learned about woods and how

to use their properties to ensure performance.

In 1980, he moved to Montana where he met and mentored with Ted Kramer, who taught him about the unique properties of yew, the wood of choice for centuries of bow-making. Since then, Rempp has built well over 1,000 bows, ensuring that each one shoots straight and smoothly.

His bows, which are coveted by both archers for use and collectors for display, are also made from Osage, juniper, serviceberry and vine maple because different woods

have different functions, fit different designs, and fulfill specific functions.

Rempp takes particular pride in helping new bowmakers get started in the craft. He has a sense of obligation to the craft and works hard to pass his insights and skills on to the next generation.

He attends five-to-ten archery events each year, most of which are up to three days long. His area at each of these shows is crowded all day with 20 or more people watching and listening to him explain how to make a strong and true-shooting bow. He also shows people how they can use their creativity to make their bows more beautiful.

**Birdie Real Bird, Garryowen:** A member of the Crow tribe, Real Bird was raised on the reservation in a traditional family. Known throughout Montana for her exquisite beading projects and dolls, she comes from a long line of beading artists and learned to bead watching those elders work on projects. As she grew up, she began beading more complex projects under the tutelage of her grandmother.

While Real Bird was growing up, she and her grandmother sold beadwork medallions to the wives of the employees at the Bureau of Indian Affairs or the Indian Health Services to get gas money; and in college, she made and sold beaded jewelry.

She uses correct Crow traditional designs and colors in her work, but when she travels she looks for examples of Plains Indian beadwork in museum collections. Her dolls, which reflect everyday dress styles worn by her mother, Lucy Real Bird, are in numerous collections, including the Smithsonian Museum.

A retired middle school teacher, Real Bird now devotes most of her time to beading and teaching traditional Crow culture. She speaks at reservation schools where she shares information about traditional dress, tells stories and teaches language, native games and beading.

Continued on next page



Jay Old Mouse, flute maker



Glenn Brackett, fly-rod maker



Howard Knight, leather artist



Jim Rempp, bow maker